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John Muir Newsletter, January/February 1983

Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies

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JOHN MUIR NEWSLETTER



Holt-Atherton Pacific Center
for Western Studies

University of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif 95211

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UOP SIGNS PUBLICATION AGREEMENT WITH MUIR-HANNA FAMILIES

The unpublished works of John Muir, including but not limited to correspondence, manuscripts and sketches, remain the literary property of the Muir-Hanna families and are currently protected by common-law copyright. Anyone seeking to publish any portion of the Muir papers must obtain permission from an authorized representative of the Muir-Hanna families. Last September the literary heirs appointed Richard R. Hanna and Ross deLipkau as their spokesmen and empowered them to handle all matters relating to the control and publication of the papers. Early this year the University concluded a licensing agreement with the spokesmen which grants the University exclusive rights to publish a microform edition of the works of John Muir. As part of the agreement, the University agreed to copyright the publication in the name of the Muir-Hanna families. Thus the papers will soon be more formally protected by statutory copyright.

THE MUIR PHOTO COLLECTION

John Muir himself took no known photographs, but he accumulated thousands. His papers at the University of the Pacific contain over 2,500 of these visual images that span a sixty-year period. A few are foggy snapshots of family and friends. Others are scarce stereos and cabinet photos by recognized artists. The majority are scenic views taken by Muir's friends and associates. Regardless of quality of image or photographer, this microform edition will include all photos from the UOP Muir collection, plus the fifty-six photos collected by William E. Colby and now part of the Sierra Club files at the Bancroft Library. Other Muir photos have been excluded because they are not an integral part of the Muir documentary record.

[Editor's note: Our guest contributor this issue has just completed an extensive study of the Muir papers in Stockton, gathering material for a book on Muir's early years. For the past twelve years, from her home hardly a stone's throw from Fountain Lake, she has been immersed in Muiriana, visiting Muir family homesites, scouring libraries and archives, and following the memory traces that still linger in the Wisconsin communities Muir once knew.]

On a crisp morning early in November, the sun beginning to feel warm after a frosty night, Harry Kearns and I made ready for a ramble around Hickory Hill farm. Harry's father, Thomas, bought this second Wisconsin farm home of John Muir in 1873, and Harry was born here. He eventually took over the operation of the farm, and he and his wife Lurena raised their family of eight children here.

In an earlier day Daniel Muir hired his son-in-law, John Reid, to work the farm for a time. In the more recent past Harry turned the farm over to his son Maurice and his family. Lurena died a few years ago and Harry now lives at his beloved Hickory Hill, occupying the same bedroom over the cellar where Daniel Muir translated his Bible and looked out over the fields. Now in his early nineties, Kearns walks the long lane from the house to the mailbox daily as the weather permits. He takes a keen interest in the farm activities and in current affairs. He remembers well farming done by horse team and back-breaking labor. The work is still physically hard, but the use of large machinery and other modern methods brings in large yields that were not possible in Daniel's day.

On that November morning Maury filled the corncrib by elevator with fine golden corn, well dried. They had a bumper crop, but Harry said the volume will drive the prices down. The barn that the Muir family built was filled to the doorway with heavy bales of good smelling hay. Soon after 1900 Thomas raised the barn to accommodate livestock at the lower level. At the side of the barn we saw the hogs in their enclosure, well fattened, about ready for market. Up on the hill the flock of sheep grazed on gleanings left by the corn harvester.

We walked through the fields to the line fence on the north, and then to the western boundary, returning to the farm buildings along the base of the ridge where John walked in the evenings at age twenty-one or twenty-two as he agonized about his future.

Maury was not quite done at the corn crib, but he took a moment to pose with his Dad under the oak tree in the barnyard, a tree growing there at the time of the Muir family. On an earlier visit Maury's wife Mary took a moment from her busy schedule to have her picture taken under one of the oaks east of the house. These trees were also growing during the years the Muirs lived there.

For all the years that have passed, the hustle and bustle is about the same. The Kearns children have their chores to do as the Muir children did, their responsibilities increasing as they get older. They too leave home for other pursuits as did Muir children. But these days it is easier in so many ways. In contrast with the stern, isolated life under the pious eye of Daniel Muir, the Kearns family has a fuller social life and finds more enjoyment in living.

HICKORY HILL cont.

The general area around Hickory Hill is still predominately agricultural and wooded; but there are more houses now, and at least one large acreage has been broken up into smaller parcels. The Kearns value their land and farm life. At present, this private working farm is under good stewardship.

This February, with the Wisconsin landscape under deep snow, the family is planning for their spring planting as the Muir family did. At the moment they may not be thinking of the national historic importance of this special 160 acres. They are waiting for the snow to melt--for the coming of spring--for the greening of the land. Just at the Muirs did over in February over a century before.

CLIPPING FROM THE MUIR COLLECTION

This 1899 clipping from an unidentified San Francisco paper, found in the Muir collection at the University of the Pacific, records the reunion of two old friends. Burroughs probably was not amused by the earthy misspelling of his surname.

SCIENTISTS OFF FOR ALASKA

John Muir and John Burrows Have an Affecting Meeting

SEATTLE (Wash.), May 31.--The Alaska scientific exploring party that Edward H. Harriman, a New York millionaire, is giving, sailed this afternoon on the steamer George W. Elder, which has been refitted at an expense of thousands.

There was a touching meeting this morning between two old gray-haired scientists. They were John Muir, the famous Alaskan explorer, who discovered the mighty glacier that bears his name, and John Burrows of New York, the great scientist, who has made a special study of birds. Each says he would not have gone had the other stayed home. They have watched each other's work in different fields for years and are most interested in comparing notes. It has been three years since Muir traveled in the north. He expects to spend most of his time studying Alaskan glaciers at points on the coast that he has never before visited.

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